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THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

THE HUMAN SOUL WEIGHS THREE TO FOUR OUNCES.
—DON DELILLO, *AMERICANA*

THREE TO FOUR OUNCES
Fall 1995

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1995

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Because things change and because most of us here on the staff feel that the name *The Student* does not fully reflect the artistic nature of this journal, we decided last spring to change our publication's name to ***Three to Four Ounces,*** which is the approximate weight of the human soul, according to Don Delillo in his novel *Americana.* The literary magazine is published twice per academic year by students of Wake Forest University. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors or the publisher. ***Three to Four Ounces*** is a non-profit organization; donations may be sent to P. O. Box 7247, Reynolda Station, Winston-Salem, NC 27109. Submissions may be sent to the same address. All material is chosen in a blind selection process. ***Three to Four Ounces*** is published by Goslen Printing Co., Winston-Salem. The typeface is Palatino. The cover photograph is by Richard "Ricardo" Upchurch. Three to four cheers to the staff & friends.

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For Jesus

Let's go
with a hammer
and nail down this immaculate second
let's nail the sun sky and clouds
and drive thumbtacks through the breeze
and glue the taste of watermelon to our tongues

let's make a timepiece bonfire
and in hot mechanical flames
we can nail each other in place
because if anyone can hogtie eternity
a carpenter can.

Mike Janssen

in linden

in linden
memories of wading through three foot dog-pissed snow
the spring wished it away—
she danced in bikinis
and dragged a fellow redhead (woodpecker) around by his carrot top,
bare toes stubbed unnoticed on radiating cement—
i am also a carrot top
who got stung in the armpit by a bee when hoolahooping

the day she watched the retarded girl's lips in silent fascination
and smudgy fingers found the crevice between door and frame
and mother pulled the door shut
the automatically locking door
huh?
SCREAM!

and if she had been who i am now she would have laughed
at the Stooges irony of mother fumbling her keys to the ground as she writhed
before the stoic door
but then i was she and not i
and she watched a dream life spin past
and could only whoop and yelp at pulsating
pencil-eraser colored fingertips that should have been smashed potatoes

success(!) and the key glides into the lock
graphite smoothed inner workings couldn't have moved fast enough
and suddenly she is in mother's lap
in the cool bathroom
the infamous hand blood-beats in union with punctuated breath
(i have always blamed my weird middle finger on the event)

Jane Oslislo

Kristina Hemphill

Yen Nguyen

Sweet Hitchhiker

Heather Chappel

The car pulled onto the loose gravel about an hour after lunch traffic. It was just in time, too, because he had begun to feel the heat licking at his brain, and he couldn't even remember when he'd left. Day before yesterday? Lately time was passing in hot lines, flashing like cars streaking past July heat.

This car was a Mercury Sable, maroon with no air-conditioning—the windows were rolled down. "If you're not a hemorrhoid, get off my ass" its bumper proclaimed in fat, black letters. A woman with pale bouffant hair pressing the roof of the car was in the passenger seat, a man a good deal shorter took the driver's seat, and a small head skimmed the rim of the back.

"Name's Harvey," the driver said, turning to size him up as he climbed in the back next to the girl. The girl looked about twelve, with her hair in the awkward stage of outgrowing a boyish pixie-cut. Her father had a whiskey nose, with strands of puckered red standing out at the tip, and eyebrows thicker than his eyes. He wore a black T-shirt with the sleeves and neck cut out, and little wisps of graying chest hair sprouted from the jagged collar.

"Mine's Jim," the man said, although this wasn't the truth.

"What kind of cigarettes you got there, Jim?" Harvey asked, pointing to the foil pack clutched in his hand.

"Camels. Unfiltered."

Harvey grunted as he pulled back into traffic. "Well, Jim, you might as well smoke a damn condom." The woman's pouf of hair bristled at the word "damn," and she nudged her husband, perhaps reminding him that their daughter was in the car.

"They're like chewing a mouthful of balloons," Jim agreed. "But what's a nasty habit if it's only half-ass nasty?"

This seemed to pacify Harvey as he then nodded his head; the thick, tanned creases of his neck opened and closed like mouths around the clumps of hair clinging to his ears. "My wife here," he said, as he patted her leg, "she complains every time I pick up a hitchhiker. But I say, they know things. You learn things when you're around'em. How about you, you been this smart all of your life or it come from hitchhiking?"

"Aw. Hitchhiking ain't nothing but eating a Moon Pie at a different Citgo than you ate at yesterday. Only thing I've learned from it is not to step in dead possum."

"Reckon that's more than some folks learn, though."

"Reckon so."

The car lapsed into the silence of the growling wind through the windows. The girl had hers only halfway cracked; strands of her hair were toyed up the glass. She had burrowed the heel of her palm underneath her cheekbone, her fingers pouting in curves against her palm. Her whole frame was bent, curled like a comma as she tucked herself further into the seat.

But Jim had to pull himself back into his business. The girl was not his business. "Where you folks headed?" he asked, but his voice quivered faintly.

"Just outside of Charleston. We've got family there. Having a pig pickin' tomorrow for the Murphy family reunion. How about yourself?"

"Mississippi. Natchez, I suppose," he paused as the girl shifted in her seat. "It's where I grew up. And I'd just like to see the river again."

"Ain't you got a job? family? You just pick up and leave?" The woman nudged Harvey again, and he said, "If you don't mind me askin'. Sometimes I just get caught up and forgets my hometraining ..."

The girl was looking more and more like his little girl, the shimmer in her eyes and the curve of her back and the pink, raw soles of her feet. She looked sad, and the pain boiled in his head and his empty gut. "Naw. Ain't got no family. No job worth nothing, either." He was the managing mechanic at the Coca-Cola plant in Greenville, North Carolina, until day before yesterday.

"There's the kind of life every guy wishes for. Just pick up and go, fly by the seat of your pants."

Yeah, Jim thought, I remember when that's what I wanted. Up and go to North Carolina. Be a free man. Then he met a thick-hipped, dark-skinned woman from New Jersey in TC's Deli Meats; she was buying corned beef Bible-paper thin. Corned beef. So she took him back to her apartment, and they had sex and Reuben sandwiches, with lots of sauerkraut.

For him, it was over then. Marriage, pregnancy, a new bedspread with big, tan flowers, and a toaster. Their baby would be Julia Louise. Its crib was next to the bed and her disco collection.

Smoke Rings

At dusk
He stands in the middle
Of the road again.
He cannot see through
The fog that has dampened
His mind,
His soul.

Inside
I sit in the corner chair
And try to blow rings
Like he did.

Grandfather, please come in
And show me one last time.
Make them hang in the air
Until my eyes burn.

Leon H. Corbett III

Sometimes at night he remembered her hot, swollen belly pressed against his side, the half moons of her fingernails creeping into his hand with her contractions, the sweaty vinyl of the car interior as they rode to Pitt Memorial Hospital, across from the Bee Quik. They had been so happy. He could smell the blood and disinfectant in the hospital room, see the white drape across her thighs, feel the fingernails in his palm again when they announced a healthy baby girl.

"Julia Louise," she had said before the life slipped out of her. And Julia was all he had.

"It's got its up days," Jim said to Harvey, "but I'd sure like someone around to remember to buy the milk. Had to eat my Corn Pops with beer the other day."

"Sounds like the breakfast of champions."

The two men chuckled, but Jim couldn't take his eyes off of the girl. She looked so damned much like Julia, with her quiet, dark expressions. Julia was the only baby he'd ever known that never screamed, just gave a plain wail. Her stubby digits would creep into her palms, not clinched, not mad, but a loose, pained curve of her hands and body. He wanted to comfort the girl like he couldn't comfort Julia, but more than anything he just wanted to make that note go away, make it quit in his head, and with the girl sitting looking like this it wouldn't stop.

"Dad:" it started, like her notes always did, fastened to the refrigerator door with a Ritz cracker magnet.

"I'm leaving to work on my art. I know you don't approve. I will write you once you get a chance to calm down and I get settled. Meatloaf and collards are in the fridge, but you need to buy milk. And don't forget to feed Cat.

Love always,

Jewels"

She'd left one painting, propped in the spot where her crib once was, next to her mother's old disco records. It was an acrylic of a woman slumped over a suitcase; the woman's face was a blur, but the suitcase was detailed—it was Samsonite luggage.

The girl curled her hand around her seatbelt, her hair falling in her face. Jim could bear it no longer. He wiped the grime from his hand on his pants leg. Then he touched her shafts of dark hair, just twice. A little comforting pat. The girl turned and looked at him with big, dark Julia eyes and eyebrows so long they almost connected and a quiver in her forehead. Then she turned back to the window.

"He *touched* her!" the woman shrieked from the front seat to her husband, as she nudged him. Her narrow, painted mouth flapped in rapid motion. "Get your hands off my daughter," she shot back at Jim.

"Honey," the man started in Jim's defense, but she cut him off.

"Don't honey me. Put that vagrant out."

The man, flustered, pulled off at the South Redgewood exit. It consisted of an Econo Lodge, a Jack's, and a Citgo. He pulled to the Citgo and handed Jim a dollar.

"Go buy yourself a Moon Pie," he said, his cheeks filled with color. As they drove off he could see the girl, strands of hair floating in the wind and half of her cheek and curled fingers mushed against the window. Then their car bled into the stream of cars, the blurring line of color like disco lights, like acrylics, like time.

So he bought the Moon Pie.

naked and thinking

1
the insurance salesman for
the small town of
Polktown, Montana
has a big grey dog named
Hosstleforth

2
one thing about fishing
and this took me a few moments
to figure out
i haven't done it for awhile.

3
i wish you would come over
for a cup of coffee
two empty mugs here
but nothing to fill them with
a watched pot never boils
and with me without you
that's all i can do

4
i believe it is the neighbors
again
trying to blast each other
into outer space

Douglas Crets

a plush brown chair & some red chuck taylors

squeaking overstuffed chair, croaks
w/ every shift in my muscle & the fireplace
crackles in this hotel room on the coast,
where i stood atop the tallest rock formation i could find,
wind pushing against me, billowing trenchcoat
& red tinted glasses that made the water seem
a most spectacular green, pure.

i was saying that my chuck taylors are philosophy,
worn, well-traveled, red, ripped, ruddy laces
& an om symbol (in sanskrit) on the right toe.
means more to me than the most complete theory of justice.
i stand on the porch & listen to the waves
music playing in my head, as always—
    bob dylan, "stuck inside of mobile w/ the memphis blues"
    the pixies, "gouge away"
    a thousand obscure songs, meaning known only by me.

i can find all my friends in a shitty 24-hour restaurant.
even the homosexual waiters all know my name.
a few grilled-cheese sandwiches, some cigarettes
& all too many frustrated memories
are enough to make me appreciate
a larger city's anonymity.

Daveed Gartenstein-Ross

We Went Dancing

The beauty of this place
Enhances my solitude
I can sit in a wheat field here
And take delight
In myself and everything
That surrounds me

I can sit for hours outside here
Not knowing how much time has passed
Until I can no longer see anything
But the stars and moon which help me
Make my way home

You came to visit me
Once here
And we danced
The headlights of the car shining on us
In this field
Listening to the music
Escaping from the doors
Of my family's station wagon

Now I sit here
Alone
Pleased with my memories of this place and you
And how we came together
To be here

Christina Weber

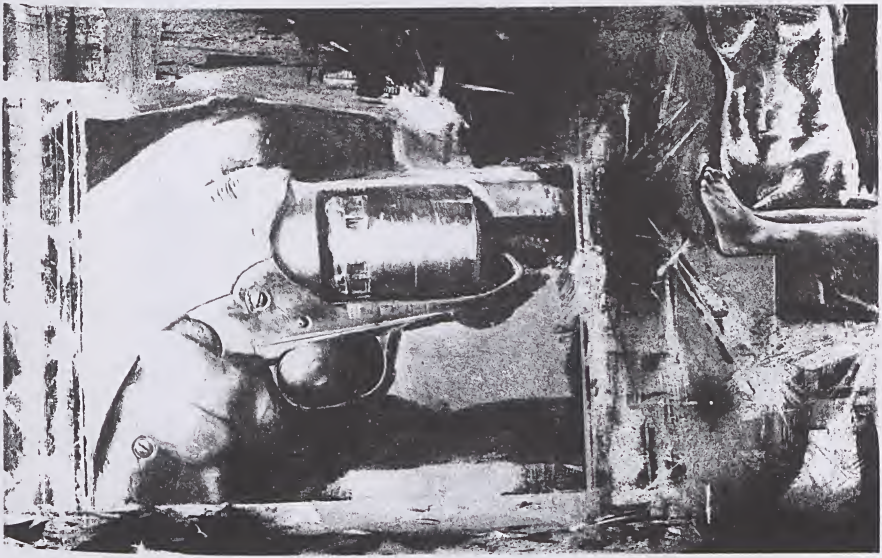
Climbing Statues

The faces of
Lafayette
Adams
Jefferson
Von Steuben
stare out with no emotion,
bronzed forever in a heroic moment.

We are ignoring,
and in fact flipping off
these symbols.
Six of us standing on the pedestal,
holding on to Washington's inner thighs.
Hanging by my fingers, climbing up
the slick side and scuffing the gray
marble with black-soled shoes:
a footprint forever immortalized.

Youth has conquered experience
again,
here in a small park.
We are ungrateful
to the figures we have scaled,
acting like crazed soldiers
attacking the enemy
one final time.

Kyle Forst



Six Rapid Shots

Jonathan Thomas

Yen Nguyen

Phone

Sadie Dunne

Sunday morning. Not surprisingly, the Velvet Underground was what was playing. It floated up, and tapped on the ceiling. The air was languid and thin. I picked up the phone, thinking it was my friend Tina.

"What? hold on ... hey, yeah? It's Billy. Do you know who this is?"

"No.—who is this?"

"You know. C'mon."

"No. Who are—"

"You don't know who this is."

"I don't know who this is."

"I can't believe it."

"Yes."

"Hey—can you hold on a second?"

He left in clatter. I could hear a pan frying, distantly. I slouched back on my open bed, in the crumpled sheets and wet my fingers in a drinking glass on the shelf. Why did I settle in and hold on?

"Right. Look, it's Billy. You're a crazy woman if you don't know me."

"Billy. Billy. I'm a crazy woman, I think." I bumped myself up and ran a hand through my hair. A thin stream of heat squeezed through the cool pre-strained air. I couldn't reach the AC to turn it up. I got up and waited, in stopped breath.

"Aw, well. No matter. It's nice to catch people, as long as you don't wake them up. Did I wake you up?"

"No, I'm awake ... well, I'm still sleeping a little." I shifted in my pale cotton shorts. The light cut through the blinds, expanded and pushed in brilliance against my window. A few seconds of the bright stripe grazing my forehead made the skin sweat, lightly. "Are you sure you said your name is Billy, and not, by any chance, Gig?"

"What's that? 'Gig'? Believe me, this is a bona-fide wrong number. —*oy vey*. Do you actually know someone with that name, or are you being unsuspectedly cute?"

"Actually, yes, I did meet someone last night with that name.—'Unsuspectedly'? Sketchy word. Look, weren't you supposed to be calling someone now? Aren't I keeping you?"

"Not at all. A name like Gig merits attention. It's a flag. I can't budge until I hear the whole thing." A pause. "If you like, I mean."

I sat up and leaned forward heavy on my thighs, staring hard at my palm. I made it open and close and watched. The animal beauty under the skin; the same hand that, at the office, picks up thumbtacks like neat bright stars. The hand that closes and splays. I got up, shook out my fingers, and started pacing.

mai(s)

the mo
on should roll to the lake
side and there bathe li
ke you

in a metal tub
with gelatin queasi
ness and fear of a star
less sky

Mike Janssen

"All right, here's the scene. I was at this party last night, and it was crazy hot, so we all went up to the roof of our friend's apartment building with a pink-shaded lamp. I was there with my friend Celia, but there was nothing really to do but drink from the warm forty-ounces they had and talk to these small-time film people in their clumps. Very slow. Celia and I wound up playing 'annoying man' at the edge of the roof, sticking out our arms at each other's nostrils, going 'I'm not *touch-ing* you,' and the like, and sort of lightly dodging this little *Baywatch*-type man, you know that show? A bob of streaked hair, too-crisp white shirt, an Indian-beaded *backpack*, for Christ's sake. The man is too pretty to be gay, too pretty for anything but sitting around rubbing his tight stomach muscles and eyeing me, rancidly. Hey, are you sure you want to hear all this?"

"God. Do *not* think of not telling me it all now. It's rich. May I ask: What do you do—as a job, that is?"

"I work at a publishing house in midtown."

"And how old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

"Whew, that's perfect. I mean, that really works. And publishing—that's very appropriate. You like it, don't you?"

"Sure." I lit a cigarette and settled my hands in my lap, stretched out again, feeling strangely warmed. "How old are you?"

"Thirty-five."

"Thirty-*five*? Hot damn. That's pretty ripe, isn't it?"

"What's that supposed to mean? It's not so old. Haven't you ever gone out with someone thirty-five?"

"No.—well, I've gone out with people older than me, but they just didn't

happen to be thirty-five. What do *you* do for a living?"

"How old was the oldest person you've been involved with?"

"The biggest age difference was probably nine years ... I was sixteen and he was twenty-five. I told him I was twelve in the middle of it; I thought it was funny, at the time. That was in Tennessee ... So, what do you do for a living?"

"I'm not telling you. So you would go out, then, with someone significantly older than you?"

"What? Well, it doesn't really matter, does it? I won't ever meet you anywhere, let alone go out with you. And what do you do for a living? Is it depraved or something?"

"I'm sorry you won't meet me. I really am. But as for what I do for a living: it's not perverted, and I won't tell you."

"Why?"

"Because you want to know so bad. You keep asking. I'll tell you at the end of the call."

"So I'll hang up now, and you'll tell me. And then I can go out."

"Don't do that. I won't ever tell you then." The slow intake of his breath—I shifted a little at the low organic sound. It spiraled out from the hollow inside the phone and filled my humid ear, already hurting from the receiver's hard plastic press. "Look."

"What?"

"Do you want to tell me the Gig story, or are you that briefly enthralled?"

"Yeah. Of course."

"OK. So this guy starts slowly circling me around midnight—dipping in and out of the crowd, talking to people; not to me, though. I'm ignoring all this with a purpose, by the way. If he hadn't been loving himself so thoroughly, he would have noticed. But no."

"You are a bitch, aren't you."

"Nice. You have no idea what I'm like, *and* you just asked me to go out with you. You can calm this rabid charm of yours, you know."

"You just told me I was too old and suspect for you to even meet with; you raised an eyebrow at my job before you even know what it is; *and* you mock small-time film people even though, from the sound of it, you probably write stories or something similarly, drearily creative yourself—on the side. I feel for Gig."

I laughed, and it broke open the air around me. Before that the light and air had seemed to rest nervously next to each other, like cellophane anxiously draped over a wedding cake. My laugh made them stick, and it felt like relief. The light and air had melted together and filled the room as a whole, fluid thing. I realized there was a day, daytime, on both sides of my chinked window.

"If you really want to know, I probably am a bitch. But it's just that I don't kid around. I mean it.—I'm not kidding around."

"I believe it."

"Well, all right then." I stopped to grind out my cigarette and looked in the mirror opposite. My face held the dread and secret curiosity of people peering at themselves on the phone. "So he keeps sliding by without stopping, and my friend Celia and I keep carving him up by the roof ledge, bitchy as you may well imagine."

"Yes."

"We were standing by the pink gauze lamp, incidentally."

"I see it."

"Eventually, Celia and I sit down on these hard rolls of roof covering, like stools, and keep talking. And this guy sits down Indian-style on the roof, just across from us, but a little off to the side. He sits there holding a brandy bottle and staring straight at me. I kept talking. After a while, he banged the bottle on the roof a few times to get our attention. I've never gotten so fascinated with someone's face as I got with Celia's. It was like her eyeballs were glowing, I was so alert."

"Right. That's pretty odd."

"It keeps going. A few minutes later he stood up with his bottle and stretched. We thought he was finally going, but instead he walks over and sits down behind us. I mean, close. No words. It was windy out, and I could still hear him breathing there. Sits down cross-legged, dangling a bottle, and looks square at our backs like he was riding a bus."

I slowed down. Rather, it slowed down—all of it. I looked at the window again and it stuck sharp in my head, all at once, that this whole morning had not moved. The light had been falling, iron-white in tiny grains through the blinds, steadily the same since dawn, and I had seen almost nothing of it. Rather, I could see nothing, stuck in the hot plastic melt of the phone, stuck to my ear almost inexplicably for almost half an hour now.

"What did you do?" His voice still filled my ear. It was like waking again. His breath was close, pouring like warm water into an aquarium.

"I got up and talked to someone else." I stopped once more. The story was no longer funny; it was not a compliment.

"My friends came over in a circle almost immediately after all this—it was that obvious. They had actually been lounging around close by, taking bets on the scene—first with amusement, then with consternation. I think he left right after that, I don't know. There was one other strange thing."

"What?"

"Well, maybe it was a scam on my friends' part, but I must have asked them five times over if they were kidding, and they said no too many times to salvage any funniness, if they meant any. He had been crying." I cleared my throat. "Look, I didn't tell you that whole thing to self-aggrandize, or whatever. I just wanted to be sure you weren't actually him calling, somehow."

"How did you know his name was Gig, and not Billy?"

"Someone told me later. Punch line. I still took a cab home."

He cleared his throat then. We both sat up straighter, I think. "I don't know. It was funny at the time." My hands were odd and bungling in my lap. "Sorry to bum out your morning. Pretty weird."

"Look, all I woke up as was horny and really hungry for bacon. Independently speaking. You didn't ruin anything."

"Thanks for sharing. And I'm glad you're so easily depressed, you artist you."

"Not at all. It's fascinating. All of it is fascinating. Inexplicable. And it's *true* —the horny thing, and the bacon, but that's already cold. And if it's true, about being horny, why shouldn't I just say it? Does it bother you that I said it?"

"I guess not. I mean, I've been on the phone with you for nearly an hour already."

"Exactly. An hour: things come across. Look, let me just ask you something. What do you look like?"

"Please." I hooted, a little. 'Blond, blue, tall, thin." I paused. "It sounds like a color swatch, and yet somehow vaguely better than the real thing. Why do you ask?"

"Sounds good. Look, I'm curious. This Gig guy clearly wasn't your type. So—what is? Just curious." He breathed in and waited.

"It's not a question of *type*, really ... it's one of—distance."

"How's that?"

I leaned back again on my sheets, softened by three weeks of nights sleeping near my skin. I had spent the morning with this man; I had woken up to him, practically. My hand clenched in sweat over the phone. Who did I speak to, and hear in my warm ear?

"Let me try something." I sat up hard again and snapped to it. My voice was full. "You are a stranger. I have another story."

"Fine. Tell me." His voice was thick, too.

I didn't know, I don't know. That Sunday, I started talking, telling him about someone three time zones away, a sore spot under my aorta, filling me secret veins. I told him, all of it. I wanted to know. I thought there would be truth in that distance. I was picking slowly over some final details, emptying, when his breathing became unmistakeable.

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing ... why, does it bother you?"

"Does it bother me? Yes, yes, it does." I stopped. "You weren't listening."

"Of course I was. Hey, don't be that way. I'm sorry. You know I wouldn't do that if I thought you cared. You know?"

A cloud moved outside. My slits of light were blotted out. "No, I don't know. How can I know?"

"You just know."

"No, you don't. Listen, don't re-dial me, OK?"

"You aren't going, are you?"

"I'm sorry ... I can't. Do you want to tell me what you do for a living now?" I laughed a little, raggedly.

"No, I guess I won't, after all. Hey—"

"I guess. Good-bye."

* * * *

I have been speaking in the shower, all these past days. I crook my arms against the shower-rail and stand in hot air, and sweat. Under the water, the nape of my neck slowly expands, like wet bread.

Stuck in a bad moment, I think. I would go back. I would talk longer, or less. I wish I could say why, the click. I think of it now as intimacy versus anonymity, maybe. He landed too hard on the former and, see-saw-like, pushed me into the latter. But that's too simple and unfair; it doesn't round off the right way. A small, rough voice—unspeakable hands and face—a morning I gave away. This mess of unknown bits I hold, like atoms. My eyes sting from the steam. I can almost see the molecules of water, their airy bonds.

Yen Nguyen

Yen Nguyen

Heat

I remember
frantic women waving
the fat, white bellies
of their arms,
and screaming
vegetable prices
to toothless vendors
of cinnamon and sage,
to carts of shiny peppers.

Some old man
selling tomatoes
to the soldier
boy with the black pistol,
and wiping his head
with the thin
white wing
of a handkerchief.

Unrelenting
car horns,
brakes, cords
of children
crossing streets.

A violin string tightened
to the edge
of explosion.

Jerusalem, 1992

Brittany Browning

Glubbed (*for Emily*)

Dirty water glubbed outta rusty ugly bucket,
made uh tin,
it

Seeped down dirty sodhill takin bugs n sprouts
to open gushin muddy crick
where bugs'd skate on tranquil eddies
n little fish glubbed littlefish bubbles
pop n fizz
like shook-up warm soda on kitchen floor uh youth

Back in days n time
when Mum'd glub slick sweet syrup of sticky on hottish soft pancake

Syrup'd glisten in earlymorn time when sun—
haphazardlike—
stumbled thru saddened bleary crusty cracked winder

Then I didn't know—
was I a poem or a song or just a waddedup paper?

Long ways away was I from time when,
lying atop soft sheets in tasty midday sweet spring air,
I put hand on
smooth stomach almost glass

You were glass—
actual fluid but not really,
always slightly oozin in your beauty

Long ways away I

from time when you n me rolled down blissful untended wildgrowin uneven hills
n laughed off fool asses to sit stare at sky like alone corrugated cardboard, like salt,
like newspaper shreddedoffers

Bumpy car rides n newgroomed dogs uh yesteryear
Lying on your sweetly sexsoiled bed n inhaling aroma of new mood
like glubbed molasses outta hole in barrel

Wanting you to come,
come back,
smooth back nekkid,
covered in dew,
staring at ceiling,
I asking self—

what is feeling?
Who makes that stew of all dem spices,
sagesse,
sensation,
scent,
steeped in love?
Where to get it, unloved, not spent?
How do you give it to me,
that feelin n not her,
her I left starin thru screen door at my sweaty back,
sweaty of sorrow, *douleur*, leftbehind curses, offhand slang slipped around bedpost?

You—

you with tender face n full lips that liked mine
so much
n softened eyes of childhood scabs I hated
n grassstained jeans in the closet in the hall

Where's dem gardens you took me to?
Sit beneath clipped sculpted bushes—
no one knew that God's better—
n we drank cold brew from bluebottles
later to hold silent wistful flowers plucked from between thumb n forefinger,
pricked by thorns,
bloodied,
dripping onto floor?

Ambiguity—
not knowing what midnight thud was, where from, why?

Questions flew

Mike Janssen

Squalor

Daveed Gartenstein-Ross

He certainly wasn't human, leaning over the miniature toilet bowl with his pants down at his knees. His hairy thighs poked out from below his boxer shorts and he felt his bladder emptying; soon the once-clear water had been filled with his Mountain Dew-yellow urine. Reached for the handle to flush the toilet, gripped the grimy silver instrument and pushed down gingerly. White spots blemished the handle. Didn't know what they were. Black stains on the bathroom walls—white walls decaying form the shower mist, yellow mildewesque rot poking through. Black stains from where the roaches had been crushed; at least he assumed they were roaches. Could be dirt, dirty finger smudges. Didn't know if there were roaches in the apartment, didn't ask. He didn't live there.

Leaning forward. The yellow water whirlpooled its way down into the pipes, replaced by nice clean and fresh aqua. Not clean, actually; he certainly wouldn't want to drink it. Perhaps he would, actually, but only if he were quite thirsty. A brown tide ring scrawled into the inside of the porcelain bowl. The toilet bowl must have been ten feet below him. Maybe more. He didn't know what a foot was, anyway. It's a long way down, he knew that, a long way down to the vortex of angry waters, yellow and clear, the drain gurgling as it sucks down the last of his wastes. The plunger depressed within the bowl. (part of the inner workings, you see, only he could hear it, like those belches you always pretend to ignore over dinner)

He felt nauseous. He probably wouldn't vomit. Nothing seemed sanitized. Nothing *was* sanitized, really, it's just that things often appear that way. He could even see the minuscule ants crawling around on the tiles below, antennae wavering madly in communication. Lifted his foot and noticed the husk—the dead body of an ant mashed against his big toe. He thought about wiping it off on the tile, but no. Only more ants there. Would probably just escalate the already problematic situation.

He towered above the sink as he went to make his hands clean, or as clean as they could be. Didn't know how he'd reach under the faucet. Like towering over a crate that he'd lift—hefted crates on the day job, you see. He could crush the entire sink with just a finger.

And then that awful mirror. Staring into his own face, and his own face staring into himself. Eventually he didn't know which was observing and which was observed. He could make out all the minuscule whiteheads lining his chin, just below the mouth. And then a large one on the side of his nose. The worst fucking place to get pimples.

He'd washed his hands hundreds—no, thousands—of times before. Familiar hot water, a bit of steam, fogging up the mirror. Mirror'd been a bit dirty to begin with. Maybe crushed bugs. He thought about washing his face—maybe not even wash, maybe just abrade the whiteheads off his face. Probably would scar later …

Then the knocking. *Is somebody knocking on the bathroom door*? Dried off his hands on the green towel, the towel people always use after going to the bathroom. Probably their hands would be dirty and they wouldn't even bother to use soap, just splashing on the hot water, the steaming water, and toweling it off again. But he came to a reconciliation; ignoring the squalor of the bathroom doesn't improve one's hygiene. Nor, for that matter, does being cognizant of it. Hopeless, as though he could never wash enough, and even if he did wash his hands for hours, they'd just get dirty again from the towel. Or the doorknob.

Yes, somebody was knocking. He couldn't unlock the door. Eventually he figured it out. Dark hair, notable tan. Perhaps the man was even Asian—named JP, he knew that. He knew of JP. But he didn't know how. "What took you so long, man?" JP asked.

"Sorry, JP," he replied. Voice stuttering or drawn out. Maybe even slurred. "I was washing my face."

"That's cool," JP said. "Whatever." JP might have shaken his head slightly or laughed, but it was obvious that JP really had to take a piss. Probably had been drinking; has that effect on you.

Soon he stumbled into another room, flopped down on a large bed. Soft, and he almost fell over. Beige comforters, dirty. Hadn't been washed in weeks. He lay on the bed. Probably couldn't move even if he wanted to. Heard them talking in the other room—his friends. He couldn't even understand what they were saying. Syllables blended together strangely. Sounded manic, laughter.

Outside it rained. Perhaps it was raining, or else not raining. Could be drops that had clung to the roof now sliding away, pelting the window occasionally. Heard a car going past, and saw the headlights from the window. The glass panes made a cracking noise as a gust of wind blew against them; the car hissed to a stop at the street corner. The window probably wasn't broken. Someday the wind would be too strong and it would shatter. He remembered the nights he'd be outside—dark—and the cars would make him nervous. Some would say paranoid.

The first thing to check is whether or not they're cops. If so, red alert. But if not, do they notice you? That is, notice you as a being anything outside the ordinary—notice that you certainly aren't human. If so, do they stop or phone the police? And then it's all a question of whether or not the police catch

as

As the man with one arm slides across the ice,
he screams, "For shame!" as
he struggles with the ropes around his torso.
then the massive flow begins to crack
to spread
he catches an edge
and the ice is red
now we turn back together and keep smiling again.

Paul Fyfe

up with you again. And if so—well, you really haven't committed any crimes. Right?

The car gave him that feeling again. They wouldn't notice the house, though—he's inside the house. Just looking out the window. Could see his own reflection in the window, by its light. Superimposed against the car.

"Has Daveed left?" he heard someone ask from the next room. It sounded female, but it could have been a high-pitched male voice. Or maybe the voice was husky. He wondered who had left at first, before realizing that Daveed was himself. He was Daveed. And although he hadn't left, he heard the answer *Yeah, I think so*. He could have cried out and told them he was in the other room, but his throat wouldn't make a squeak.

He felt his heart thumping wildly in his chest. *That's it*, he realized, *I'm dying*. He couldn't move. Perhaps death meant that he really wasn't there after all. He wondered what difference it made. Maybe they'd be surprised upon finding his body.

The ceiling squirmed. It actually wasn't much of a ceiling. The small bugs, the really little ones who are attracted to light bulbs but die when they actually come into contact—he could see their bodies, frail, atop the filter to the overhead bulbs above. He forgot the name of the filter. He couldn't remember any words, in fact.

The distinct buzzing startled him. Ringing, frightening, like death, announcing a presence. Perhaps not really like death. Sometimes death is silent. He didn't know—he'd never seen death, only its after-effects. The ant's body on his big toe. They had certainly been silent. And he'd killed hundreds—no, thousands—of ants in his life.

It was actually the telephone, the ringing was, he realized. And

sometimes that is even worse. The phone can be Authority. He didn't know how authority registered against death. The bathroom door clicked in the hallway. JP was done, or maybe somebody else was entering. JP could have finished a long time ago. Or someone other than JP could be leaving. He didn't know—he couldn't see the bathroom door from here.

He wondered if he should answer the phone. But realized it wasn't his apartment. He always enjoyed answering the phone. Sometimes it would be friends. Sometimes complete strangers. Sometimes friends pretending to be strangers, sometimes strangers pretending to be friends. Sometimes they just hung up—sometimes the people perhaps weren't even real. He couldn't even see them. He wondered if people taped his conversations. Probably not. He never said anything interesting. Maybe they'd say something interesting when they found him dead.

Eventually someone entered the room. He'd been asleep; he'd probably been awake before, but perhaps he hadn't. He hadn't died, at any rate, to the best of his knowledge. He had to take a leak, although he seemed to remember doing that before. He'd done it hundreds—no, thousands—of times before, so it came as no real challenge. Some times were more gratifying than others. JP had left the bathroom by now, at least, and the sink was only disproportioned in a minor way. He stared at himself in the blotted mirror, and his self stared back.

Landscape

Terry Tracey

Yen Nguyen

grapes

1

The unique property of wine
I Believe
is the way in which each
drop of the lively juice
sounds like stars spilling,
endlessly into your soul.
And when you drink the
crazy grapes
you can feel each of them
begin their own universe.
Propagating past human
boundaries
Spinning you around asteroids
and moons.

2

On one night, after lazy
twilight
We sat around a table
feeling communal, and
Breaking Bread.
Candles flickered, sending tango
shadows across our faces
And all was good with the world.
Night spilled into early morning
and we began to dance
and shout and spin.
Each man and woman flipped
inside out and tumbled to the ground
leaving in the air that heavy rush of
joy

3

Now, trash lies scattered on the
lawn

And the cat sits on the table
eating chicken.
We are all back inside of ourselves
But there is a twinkle, an extra
spark
Or maybe a new feeling surrounding
us.
That which makes us lighter.

Douglas Crets

what they mean: home

i love
the way
they say it:
carolina
caralina
caralana
karalana
keralana
keralanah
kera-lanah.
what they mean: home.

Knox Robinson

her

sunshine kisses her cheek
while i nestle under
hot moons that are her breasts.
Down I meander, tracing her ribs
meeting her belly button in
casual conversation.
Slip seconds later
between the Strait of Gibraltar
and kiss her
Picasso painting

Natasha Vincent

Writing about Writing about Writing

there is only so much credit
you can give a preposition
because he'll get turgid in the head

i could draw a map of my inner paths
and show you the leafy and brambled
way to my neuroses
that inspire this genius.
solid dirt and rock underfoot
stability, the product of necessity
and patience

i could plop down a corpse of my art
on a bland slab
and dissect its remains for you
preservative stinging our corneas
and explain—while stretching out a piece of
intestines on a dull probe—
how one digests and mulls over
a nutritious poem
and how adjectives are absorbed by the villi
while adverbs are taken into the lacteals
and slang passes right through the
ascending,
descending, and
sigmoid colons to the rectum where it is then
liberated into culture.

Jane Oslislo

5¢ Refund: An Introduction

Michael Janssen

I.

5¢ Refund yelled at a mailbox.

"I have erected a flower to a loved one!"

He was ready for love. He just didn't know from whom.

Earlier that week he had erected a flower in her honor. He hoped that she would come see him soon. He waited on the couch outside of his house every day. Sometimes, he ate grilled cheese sandwiches. Sometimes, he ate donuts. Powder surrounded his mouth when he ate donuts, and he deliberately did not wipe it off. He wanted the girl to sit next to him and kiss him wholeheartedly. Then she would have the powder on *her* face, and the advantage would be his.

II.

Once 5¢ tried to bottle laughter. He printed up a label that said

Laughter

in flowery print. Then one day after a nap, he sat up and

whack

slapped the label on a bottle.

Then he laughed into it and corked the bottle.

Once the bottle held wine.

Now it held laughter.

He had made a benevolent Molotov Cocktail.

He rode the bus into town and walked around town a long time trying to find the one place where people had the biggest sticks up their asses.

A long time ago 5¢ had declared it his mission to remove those sticks.

"The only problem with that," he had said, "is that a lot of shit is bound to follow the sticks."

After searching for a while, he found City Hall. Go fight City Hall, they had said. Too bad he couldn't remember who *they* were. He'd mail them an Xmas card celebrating the birth of Jesus X. No relation to Malcolm.

Standing at the foot of those massive marble steps, he felt a little bit afraid. But only a little. He ran up the steps, two by two by three by two again when he stopped feeling ambitious. He flung open the massive oak door, yelled "'Tis an ill wind that blows no minds!" and then he

hurled

thebottleintothelobbyCRASH!

He expected his laughter to roll out, flow over the vinyl chairs, flow over the floors, flow over the pencils and pens and papers and staplers.

But it didn't.

He scampered off into the bowels of downtown. He didn't want to be discovered. Someday he would try again. He would not give up!

So he was a little melancholy, sitting on the porch outside the general store. He couldn't help thinking about sitting on his couch again. The porch was hard and splintery and uncompromising. He could feel his rump combatting the wood. His rump and the wood fancied themselves as Shakespearean actors, albeit amateurs.

Act I, Scene I

RUMP: Butt soft! And thou'rt not. Transmogrify.
WOOD: Nay! I shall not budge for thee, ass.
RUMP: Alack, alas, an impasse.

When 5¢ sat on the couch, he looked across the street. A girl lived across the street. Her radio played faint music, music that sounded like a compilation tape of Songs You Hear Through the Floors of Greenwich Village Apartments. It made 5¢ happy to watch her wearing dresses and practice

bassoon. When she played 5¢ was convinced that she was sucking a thick, syrupy, sweet mix of children's tears and molasses out of its mysterious recesses and she was distilling it in the backyard and spreading it on toast. *Mmm boy,* he thought. *That would be good toast.*

Maybe she would get powdered donut powder on her face.

Interlude (to whet the palate)

5¢ Refund lay confoundedly stuped
on dead grass n wet leaves n mud
of unusually balmy winter day

Inniz haid
(iz ugly frazzled haid)
he catapulted wizards hats
n took all the postage stamps in the world to bed with him
where portraits of the long dead nuzzled iz tender lobes with adhesive
bidder nothings

5¢ Refund
livin fleshy monument to all that is forlornly frivolous in this misbegotten
world

5¢ Refund
a hero inniz ugly haid
a compendium of all dem halfbaked secret ruminations y overhear at the
grocery store er n nursin
homes

5¢ Refund
stole all the periods
whatz all the writers gonna do

when they wanna end a sentence

5¢ Refundz got all that punchyation
inna bathroom sink
and alla cliches in a cardboard box under the stairs
labeled XMAS ORNAMENTS

5¢s taken the English language hostage
and he aint gonna give it up
til ya go out n lick the clouds
n pull off yer pants n do a little dance
n transcend all the SHIT in this world

So huzzahs abound for 5¢ Refund!
(eez kind enough to loan me that exclymation point)
friend to you n me
mystery man beneath every pillow
his ubiquitous Johnny Hancock on every bottle uh
Sprite
Moxie
Yoohoo

III.

"How do I send an aroma?"

5¢ Refund scratched his old noggin and mulled over this seemingly preposterous question.

But to 5¢, this question was not in the least preposterous, because 5¢ Refund is preposterous.

The fact that 5¢ Refund, a funny-named ugly-headed nobody of a fool, washes his hands every day, reads a book a week, cooks up some pasta when he feels like it—even the mere fact that 5¢ *exists* bucks the universe into a

slightly off-kilter orbit. No sane world would have room for a fella like 5¢—if we lived in a world without sex or wine or Beanee Weanees, then 5¢ would've been knocked right back up to Heaven with all the other good ideas for new people that never get used and just pile up on a cloud. But here he is, and there he was scritchin' his head on his couch, and that's that.

5¢, as you may know, is in love. Not a surprise, because he's pretty much always in love—just not always with people. Sometimes his ideas tickle him and seduce him, too. But this time, it's a girl. From afar her life seems like one big dance. Of course, 5¢ realizes that this is from afar, and his eyesight's not all that hot. The only sense 5¢ trusts is smell.

Which brings us back to the dilemma at hand. 5¢ is probing his ugly head with a long skinny finger wondering how to cram a scent into an envelope and mail it across the street. He was pretty damn tired of language—it just wasn't doing him much good these days.

"Language," he had told his friend and grocer Styptic Triptych, "is empty and hollow and you can't even play it like a flute or nothin'. It's a bad kind of hollow. Every time I speak, I'm compromising myself. The words I'm using now—they ain't me. *This* is me," 5¢ said, proudly thumping his meager chest. "And I'm not a tangle of words any ol' chawbacon can find in a dictionary, Stip. I'm not in any book, yet, and I never will be, either."

"Well, what're ya gonna do, 5¢?" Styptic was a grubby squat man. When he thought of his dog Not Ice Cream, a smile would erupt on his face as if his nose had opened an umbrella. It was a tremendous thing to see the grocer's face deeply groove with wrinkles like a sped-up grape in the sun. "You gotta have language, pal, or else ya couldn't sound a barbaric yawp from the rooftops or recite Wallace Stevens to a sad old woman or buy new underwear at the mall!"

"Yeah, I know, but is all that worth it? I mean, I don't know how to yawp anyways, and I don't understand Wallace Stevens, and I don't wear underwear much anyhow. There's gotta be a better way, huh, Stip?"

"Ya think too much, kid. Someday that ugly head's gonna double you over. Have a sasparilla. It's on me."

"Thanks, Stip." 5¢ said, and shuffled out the door deep in thought.

He sat on the porch step in front of Stip's store and squinted at the fluffy clouds overhead which hovered above the treetops like pensive cotton.

IV.

Festooned in cellophane, the grilled cheese sandwich was a celebration of bread and dairy. 5¢ was only too happy to relieve it of its grandeur in three quick bites.

"I hate a show-off," he said.

V.

The Ink-wizishun

What entails 5¢ Refund?

Little — the simmering waft of heat atop asphalt. The misspelling of the word "misspell."

Is he afraid?

Oh, sure.

Of what?

The concrete, the inked, the said, the stated. Eyes of others trained on him. Fleeting impressions made permanent.

Why? What is his raison d'être?

Apples. Being too tall for his thoughts. People's ugly feet. Cellophane veils on sandwiches. Condensation. Insides.

What deflates him?

Heat on summer days. Maple syrup. Hypnosis. '80s top 40 blaring out

of red plastic handheld transistor radios. Television.

How can I meet this 5¢ Refund?

Send an SASE and an EEG of your REM stage to:
5¢ REFUND
a mailbox on the side of the road
inside you
USA

Will he write back?

Yes. Allow time for rescuing windswept paper bags from oncoming cars, rituals, chocolate milk, lawn ornaments, Pez dispenser collectors' conventions, croquet with the Red Queen.

What if he doesn't?

Consult your nearest Coke bottle.

VI.

Swiggin dim green pickle brine from a widemouth Mason jar n munchin crumby Saltines 5¢ Refund left a trail of debris as he walked through town

To watch 5¢ walk is like crumplin up yr will or burnin dollar bills somehow—you know? I do but I cant *explain* you gotta see it. If he were a typewriter why when walkin keys would jam where he stops studyin trace of clothing on the ground smells a stray scarf and thunks of a girl—

n letters would drop when he stops t'look at clouds be a tall totem pole of sorts of shorts n shirt and shoes not to match—*he's some lackadaisical slouch* the neighbors say *up to no good* and their sour faces pucker into themselves like old torn worn leather coinpurses fulla dirty change stitched

lips n so forth—

5¢ dont care he moves on he's not afraid to steer a pen across a page to leak dribble un cert ain ly ... a trail of ink a river which betrays his buried thoughts—thinkin about the rhythm of a big drum in a parade or the hat on this dowdy gal buyin green peppers at the farmers market—

Picture it! 5¢ loves fruit—rummagin through the raspberries he saw over the watermelons daisies stuffed in a straw frame and perched atop a blonde croppa hair—neath unfurled a willowy form inna lovely long dress of flowers n scent that teased 5¢ made him long for talks with her above cake on sturdy mahogany table in the desolate corner of some seedy café—

Oblivious to his admirations she moved on to the pickles homemade next to the peppers and plucked them pickles 1 2 3 let them rest in a paper sack beside the peppers

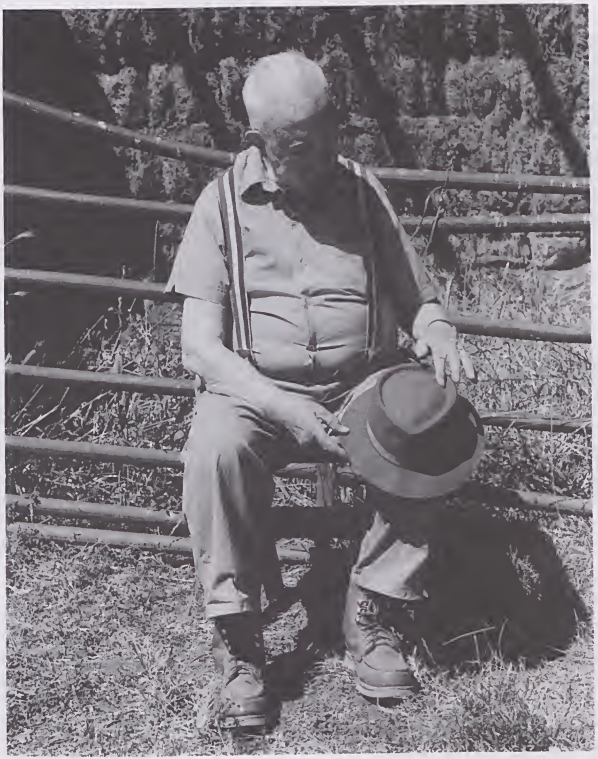
O who knows what conversations took place in the bounds of that homely bag?—cause when a pretty girl's around and the sun's in the air just so and all the smells are out caressin noses, anything can happen, and certainly vegetables can chat like old chums among other things—

The girl moved on and 5¢ just admired from under the brim of his ugly ole cap but that's okay—

cause all 5¢ needs is the smell of the girls soft skin in his nose and the jar of cuke brine to remind him of her

cause all he need's a memory

and all he needs is all around



Will Garin

The Jazz Band II

Matt Jones

autumn in new york
variations on a theme
by ella fitzgerald

this october morning
i woke from singular dreams
of tempestuous deaths
& drove into nearby hills

in the distance a city
wheezed in haze
but around me every tree blazed with clean fires
    & sent bits of flame
    into the air
like burning pitch
on the autumn wind

i collected saffron leaves
for friends in faraway places
& knelt in roadside gravel
to contemplate a blue weed-flower meditating in solitude:

all its lovers departed now
& other plants going down
the blue weed-flower rose up
to the waning sun
only because it thought it could

to think of it now
the crooked stem
the thousand-petaled cluster
i weep

i weep for my mother in the hospital
& i weep for the loneliness of the long distance runner

i weep for the tin can laugh of the bitter man
for the stack of unfinished poems
& for the loveless caress in the dark

i weep for the impermanence of the seasons
& for a nation buckling under the weight
of its own sins remembered

i weep for the simplicity of a blue weed-flower in october

Knox Robinson

Constellations

Drops of milk
Feeding only the imagination.
A man points a wetted finger to Orion
His daughter says nothing,
As if she already knows
There will be harder things
She has to swallow.

Elise Murphy

Rebecca

Rebecca's apartment smelled different—
the combination of yucca and cow tongue—
things not cooked in my vicinities—
smells of textured Ecuador
her mother licked her thick lips as she spoke—
Zoila, i recall your name

in play
Rebecca cajoled me to climb into the defunct incinerator
in the basement newspaper room—
—outside—
last week's Ledger and Times
on a rickety table beside
the wonderland door embedded in cement,
cast iron, sculpted, battered,
heavy with secrets,
swung rust-stubborn open to the
—inside—
mites of flaked paper
fluttering and spinning in currents that carried
our hair from our slick necks—
chimney bricks lit by outside sun
reflecting off seas of scorched and torn yesterday

years later i returned to Rebecca's apartment
Ronald, Zoila's husband, snored and squanked in the bedroom
Rebecca and i lay on the dank pull-out bed in the living room
in the blue strobe of tv light
and when i saw something scuttle across the floor and smelled
the rank of the unscraped dishes
hairy in the sink,
i wished i'd burned.

Jane Oslislo

M.S.A.

Seeing you all
Standing over her
Coffin and grave
I realized why pictures
In black and white show the most color
Seeing you three
Arms braided
I knew how much you wanted to hold her
And cry for her
You stood there
Three knights fighting a terrible battle
Trying to hold back your tears for us
As they glided down your cheeks
And I seeing your picturesque stance
Knew I could not hold my tears inside

Christina Weber

Hacky Sacks and Love: A Similarity

The relationship has commenced
Upon the advent of the woven spectacle
From the dark recesses of a pocket
To the attractive solar warmth of day.
Nonchalantly, it greets its descent
To the comfort of the laces
Upon the shoe,
Finds a niche from which to part
In the grinning infatuation of the first set.
Tap, tap.
A comfortable rhythm quickly takes the norm
Until the hacky longs for the painless punch of the next sneaker
Gulping the brief plights of ecstasy
As seconds of joyous oblivion
Amongst the instigating Airwalks.
Smacked into brainless elation through the humid air until gravity
Clutches our friend,
Yanking it down to the next inevitable hack.
Back up again.
So high this time.
The hacky smiles.
Peril seems so distant over the threatening concrete;
Flight holds an empty promise of endless euphoria.
The hacky laughs before it sees its doom.
Oh, shit.
Grasping helplessly onto last bits of air before
It plummets,
Tragically.
A tearful puddle of despair. —The hacky is soaked.
Now I'm wishing I wasn't seeing your pitiful smile
That tries to soften the words,
"Sorry, I guess we can't play anymore."

Alison Becker

rain

The storm was over
and the hot flash of lightning
that we had both hoped for
searched for
asked each other's gods for
never came to christen our dreams with reality
and electricity continued to surge
from the power source
across our bodies
through the clocks,
permitting them to tick away the seconds
with humanlike unrelent.
And so it was told,
the dramatic salvation
that we had hoped for
searched for
asked each other's gods for
never lived the beauty in reality
that it lived in our dreams
foregone by life's insistent triumph
which it had hoped for
searched for
and asked our faithless gods for.

Julie Mathes

Gertrude's Longing

Jane Oslislo

Her mother had shown her Gertrude's Longing. And now it was she who, once a daughter, now led her own daughter through the woods. Her daughter's time of maturation had come the previous night and it was time to tell her the tale. The path to the river side seemed a bit overgrown, and she remembered her tired age even though the lushness and verdure of the forest invigorated her. She hadn't known where the story had originated; she only knew it was older than the forest she and her offspring traversed. Anonymous birds and insects whooped and screamed in the globe of her consciousness—beckoning, cajoling, and chiding. They never relented their sermons and tirades to her, but she mulishly pursued the path.

As she reached the clearing, crisp air from the rushing waters cooled her damp skin. She turned and glanced at her daughter, a girl itchy with growth, enthralled by the beauty of Gertrude's Longing, with its cascading water and drooping willows. For a moment, she was all the women in her family, from her greatest-grandmother to the embryo that would one day develop within one of the eggs within her own daughter. She located the tree of fables and sat beneath it. Her daughter did the same. They did not speak for some time.

Finally, she spoke, "This place is Gertrude's Longing. Do you know why you are here?"

After a long silence her daughter answered, "To learn what it is to be woman."

"And what is this 'woman'?"

"The word 'woman' comes from the Old English word for 'monster-maker.' That is all I know."

"Walk until you find the right place in Gertrude's Longing, and when you find it, sit there until you understand 'woman.'"

"How do I know when I've ... what will I ..."

"Go."

As she watched this half-child, half-woman stumble towards the inevitable, reality flinched, and the hard earth began to waiver. She almost jumped back into the vegetation, yearning for the warmth and stinking of the forest's mud, wishing she could steal away and sink into the primordial. She remained despite the birds' and insects' persuasions. A while after her

daughter was no longer in her field of vision, the song began. A frigid relief that her daughter had found her place swept over her. Some of the women had never found the song, and had to either invent their own and pretend or had wandered off in search of their own magic, forever lost to the community. The wind played the hollows of the willows and sang of times forgotten. It sang of blood and the moon and misunderstanding. It crooned about law and babies. It reminded her of the manacles and the pedestals. And above all this it told her that a half never makes a whole.

Her daughter returned flustered and sat before her. They looked into each other's eyes. She knew it was now time for the tale.

"Some time ago, when the parent of this willow was a seed hanging on its parent, a king ruled. He was married to a sorceress. He didn't know she was a sorceress when he first was introduced to her. Actually, no one did, and the song has taught you why I assume. As a child, this sorceress had entertained herself by playing in her mother's garden. She chose the butterfly, the snake, and the toadstool as her most cherished confidants in this garden and possibly in all of her father's kingdom. She appreciated the butterfly for its delicate grace, the snake for its charm and wit, and the toadstool for its heavy deliberations. Years of carrying these creatures around with her made her assume their characteristics. She had all the vulgarities and subtleties that constituted these entities within her, but to list them all would keep us here eons.

"The sorceress had a son by the king. As you will learn soon, husband and wife can keep nothing from one another. And when her husband-king discovered the creatures in her belly, he froze all but the butterfly. He knew what trouble the snake had gotten woman into before, and he wasn't going to be blamed for a second mistake. He froze the toadstool because he knew a toadstool was poisonous to a woman. He allowed only the butterfly to flap and flutter within her. He was wise and knew the butterfly's soft ways couldn't harm the woman. Every night, he would freeze two-thirds of her belly the way the men know how, and by day the sorceress would flap and flutter girlishly about the castle the way her butterfly flapped and fluttered within her.

"Someone had been watching the sorceress, though. Another man had been following her light movements. This man was the king's younger and more virile brother. Unlike his older brother, he could see the woman's frozen decay—the retreat into her mad flutterings. One day, when she was dancing through the castle, she recognized salvation. She purposely flew too

close to the brother, and he touched her. At that instant, the ice caverns of her belly began to thaw. The snake wriggled. When he pulled her to him, the waters flowed out of her, on her brow, her forearms, her back, neck … It soaked her and the brother. He breathed fire and within her the snake chased the butterfly and snapped at it. The butterfly hid in the cap of the toadstool; the snake swallowed them both and grabbed onto its own tail circling round and round in her stomach. The serpent regurgitated its two friends and the cycle began again.

"The brother was mad for the sorceress' waters. Simply enough, he killed the king-husband, married her, and became the new king—all for her waters. He would destroy anything in his way of his obsession, including her melancholy son from her first marriage. The son was distraught; he couldn't believe his mother had allowed herself to be unfrozen. You see, he was his father's son, and there were some things he just couldn't fathom. But each man, the son and the brother, wanted the other dead. And when men want each other dead, that's what they get. And since the two men were all the sorceress had, she died, too."

She watched her daughter narrow her eyes slowly in contemplation. They sat in silence. And when the time was right, she rose and left her daughter sitting in Gertrude's Longing, left her to find her way back home herself. And while she found her way stubbornly through the dank forest, she wondered about the men, and how they tell the story to their sons, and where they tell it.

Allison Cristofoli

Learning to be First

Kristina Hemphill

the last thing you do is never
the last thing you do

every minute of it
was pain
and every minute of it
was the best time of my life
I'm glad it never lasted.

sit i do, staring at a wall clock
perched on this bench
like a wallflower
never gonna move again
think I'll have a bite to eat

walk to the grocery store
man, she was the best
i ever had
let her slip away
wow, there's a lovely hand

picking up a tender squash
(hey buddy, i know how you feel)

suddenly i am a vegetarian
and she is next to
unbelievably gorgeous

Walk out the door with a bag of fruit
and a phone number
i'll have her over for some steak one night
but now i gotta go home and remind myself
of the past

Douglas Crets

Van Gogh

Van Gogh
Made his skies twist
His spirals edge upward
To these stars encircled by light
The wind moves
And you can see its path
You can feel his hands
And I wonder
Why as his life was spinning
Out of control
He stopped and painted
Something so ordinary as stars

Christina Weber

SPRING
1996

THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

WAKE
FOREST
UNIVERSITY

THE HUMAN SOUL WEIGHS THREE TO FOUR OUNCES.
—DON DELILLO, *AMERICANA*

THREE TO FOUR OUNCES
Spring 1996

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Because things change and because most of us here on the staff feel that the name *The Student* does not fully reflect the artistic nature of this journal, we decided last year to change our publication's name to ***Three to Four Ounces,*** which is the approximate weight of the human soul, according to Don Delillo in his novel *Americana.* The literary magazine is published twice per academic year by students of Wake Forest University. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors or the publisher. ***Three to Four Ounces*** is a non-profit organization; donations may be sent to P. O. Box 7247, Reynolda Station, Winston-Salem, NC 27109. Submissions may be sent to the same address. All material is chosen in a blind selection process. ***Three to Four Ounces*** is published by Goslen Printing Co., Winston-Salem. The typeface is Palatino. The cover art is by Gaye-Taylor Hederman. (Egypt has its consequences.) Three to four cheers to the staff & friends.

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On the doorstep

Endow it with a forked tongue.
Make it explain itself

its birth,
how it got here,
a swarm of fingerprints for lips.

Is it sleeping?
Should we break it?
If it cries,
how do we calm it?

A milky shush,
a broth rich
with fat and steam.

Offer it a hunk of bread
or maybe an ear.

Then it might jabber,
mumble a dream
of a box of teeth
and a jawbone
on a shelf in the potter's shed.

Mike Janssen

Kneeling Down

Sparrows lilt to the breathing window from
their midnight house, crickets hush their lovers'
strings of the day unwrapped, undone,
silent, stark as a gift misunderstood.

Inside a hand weights the bed, knees pull toward
the floor, dispersing carpet, pushing out breath
like the old woman's walk to the kitchen,
like the school child's run home.

Hands crawl into clasp, eyelids begin
the long journey to lashes lying down,
soft heels of palms, head tumbles in
Words inhale exhale the i am here resounds.

The cock's crow, the dew's life, and the children delay, while
Those wise in smallness have come to pray.

Meredith Wayne

Michael O'Neill

Sis's

Katina Parker

the soul that eateth

Daveed Gartenstein-Ross

I sat on the wood bench in the middle of the plaza by the unreal light of dusk. The illumination of street lamps pierced through the smoggy darkness, & I watched the throngs of people shuffling past me. Tourists here for the plays, wrapped in striped T-shirts, generic park scum in baggy shorts, panhandling anybody they get close to, & the people like me, bored & apathetic students who come downtown looking for something to do. Someone to meet, maybe other bored & apathetic students, but somehow they failed to interest me.

Then he sauntered up to the bench, dragging one foot behind as he walked, stringy white hair & wild eyes, constantly moving, dressed in blue jeans & a pink tanktop, & he slumped down next to me as though physically exhausted, inhaling deeply. "They're crazy," he said. "It's a mass psychosis. Ever since Clinton took the White House..."

"What's the problem?" I asked. I probably shouldn't have spoken because that only served as encouragement. I'd seen him before—my friend Mike had been down last summer, wearing something like a Pantera shirt with weird graphics, & we'd been waiting in line at a restaurant when this old guy came up, circling Mike & scoping out his shirt, whacking away on a huge wad of gum, & finally the old guy said, *We don't get much of that around here.* We'd laughed about it later, but something was wrong with this guy, seriously wrong. Also, he smelled like a goat.

"Everybody thinks I'm a pizza," he said. "They're trying to eat me."

"That's ridiculous," I replied. "You don't look anything like a pizza."

"I know. Oh, I know! That's what I tell em," he said. "But...they think I'm a pizza. They all think I'm a pizza! I tell em, I say, 'You got the wrong guy. I ain't no pizza!' But it's like..."

Josh Stainbrook walked up, wearing his black trenchcoat, giving a curt wave of his hand & a nod of the head. "Hey, Daveed, you going to eat that pizza you got there?"

I looked at the old guy & he just nodded. "Uh...yeah," I said. "Yeah, I think so."

"Oh, come on, Daveed. You have so much. Just one slice. Come on, I'm so hungry, I haven't eaten in like, three days. Me & Blake spent all our money

on beer & cigarettes."

"Not wise." I clucked my tongue.

"Just one bite?"

"Fine," I conceded.

Josh grabbed the old guy's arm & dug his teeth into it, ripping out a bloody hunk of flesh. The old guy let out a wail, grabbing the wound & reproaching me. "Why'd you let him bite me? Can't you see that I'm not a pizza?"

"Josh, that's all," I said. "I'm really hungry, man."

"You can't be *that* hungry! C'mon, Daveed."

"Josh, go," I said, pointing uptown. "Go." & he did.

"See?" the old guy screamed triumphantly. "See? Everybody thinks that I'm a pizza. You're the only one who knows the truth, the terrible truth."

A stocky guy was walking past, in a polo shirt & blue shorts, with dark curly hair. "Excuse me, sir," I said, pointing toward the geezer on the bench. "Sir, could you please tell me what you see there?"

"A pizza," he replied, shaking his head in vague disdain.

The old man smiled crookedly, extending his hand. "The name's Charlie. Charlie Kowacki. I'm glad somebody can tell that I'm not a pizza." He reached into the pocket of his dungarees & pulled out a stick of chewing gum, in silver wrapping paper. "Want one?" he asked.

"No. I detest chewing gum."

"Harsh words." He smiled. "Well, what'll we do now?"

"What do you mean, 'we'? I have no desire to hang out with some sociopathic twit who everybody thinks is a pizza. Besides, you smell bad too. I'm going to Garo's."

"No," he said. "I'm coming with you. Please. Please."

"You're not coming with me," I answered, looking around the plaza. "Hey, everybody!" I yelled. "*Free pizza!*"

A whooping went up for blocks around & the masses descended. Punk skaters, fat joggers, hungry loggers from the hick Log Cabin Tavern, Shakespearean actors who wanted to grab a bite before the show, muttering something about anchovies & *My God, I've never seen a pizza that big before!*

"No, no, no!" Charlie screamed. "I'm not a pizza!! I'm *not* a pizza! *Auuughhhgh!*" His cries gradually faded. It really was a pleasant evening.

I stared at the chessboard in perplexity. I was playing against my old pal

Jay, moving my queen in for a diagonal check, & as his king retreated out of danger my rook captured a pawn on the left side of the board. Mate in four, I thought. I picked up my Italian soda & took a drink...

"Daveed! What are you doing?" I looked up & saw that I'd been sucking on Jay's hand.

"Oh, sorry man," I said. "I mistook you for my Italian soda." He shook his head & resumed playing, when a giant submarine sandwich sat down next to me. Garnished with avocado & bacon, the aroma washing over my nostrils, & mmmm, like the kind you can get at the Breadboard on the north end of town, fresh vegetables &...

"Daveed!" I'd just taken a bite out of Rob Shapiro's biceps. My head swam.

"Sorry," I muttered. "I'm having troubles..." I got up & walked away.

Food swarmed past me. Or was it people?

Gigantic Hostess Twinkies, apple pies cooked with cinnamon & brown sugar, marionberry torts slathered with whipped cream & slightly warmed, steam rising from them, hot dogs layered with chili & cheese, oversized bowls of Campbell's tomato soup. I felt so hungry & yet I dared not eat.

I couldn't even find my car. Instead an enormous double cheeseburger stood in its place. I sank to my knees & screamed, wailing & pounding my fists against my heretofore drivable vehicle. "What is *happening* to me?" I wondered out loud. I had to get home. I turned around. Marshmallows & donuts rolled through the streets. Which were cars & which were people? Had everything transformed to food or was I hallucinating? Or had Charlie Kowacki really been a pizza, & yet my deranged mind thought he was actually human?

I staggered along, groping my way uptown. I bumped into a bowl of spaghetti, & marinara splashed all over my clothing. Something had begun to change; not in the way I viewed the other people, they'd looked like edibles to me for some time. I knew I was out of my fucking head, but how they looked at *me*. I heard voices—they were talking, I heard somebody say the word pepperoni—& they were *hungry*.

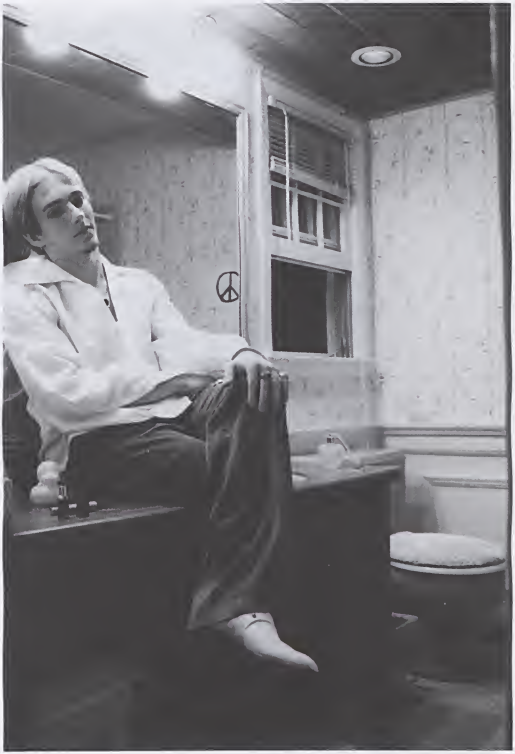
What is food? I wondered. Perhaps that's what Jeffrey Dahmer had wondered all along, but I'm sure his definition would differ from mine in general. What I thought were people looked like food to me, meats & vegetables & cheeses—perhaps, I wondered, just maybe—would food look like people?

Had I been eating people all my life? All my friends, my girlfriends, teachers & rolemodels—nothing but the next PBJ sandwich?

& me, what was I? Had I been food all along? I stumbled onto East Main Street, avoiding the oversized shrimp omelettes that I assumed were cars. *I'm cracking up.* I heard barking behind me, & this husky male voice, *Look Eddie, a steak!* The dog was on my heels, yapping away, only it looked like a big loaf of white bread, & I ran, felt the teeth tearing into my ankles, down the street, running out of wind, my shins felt anorexic, the skin clinging weakly to my legs. I'd stumble, struggle to my feet, keep running. A blur.

Somehow I got back to my house again, unlocked the front door & breathed a heavy sigh of relief. Home sweet home. Safety.

Ugh. I was famished. I opened up the fridge & poured myself a tall glass of orange juice. I thought I heard it say something as I gulped it down.



Alison Becker

Sandeman Margaret Feinberg

summer spray

we boyz! we boyz! click!click! boom!
ev rybody down body to ground ev rybody down
face down swinging toddlers sliding children
quiet piercing ev rybody down coed little league
park legends amass action ceasing ev rybody down
m work late momma rushing home groceries scattered
hug ground hug ground child in hand child in hand child in hand
child at feet stop time
ev rybody ev ry body ev rybody
down
we boyz! we boyz! we boyz! foreva foreva
words spiraling ball bouncing click!click! click!click!
sweat poring click!click! dust settling
m brotha standing confusion whispering please calling
please fool m brotha standing laughing even
m mouth dry click!click! boom!

Katina Parker

river fishing

underneath the moon's river
catfish tumble
our conversation the unsteady rhythm
accompanying the bell, tied to fish-pole line
jangling, the cymbal for the stars

Douglas Crets

Untitled

We walk in circles at night,
untying blades of grass,
kneading hills into plains.
Circles incessant like crickets,
an honest,
thorough
cadence of labor
spent like water.

We say unspeakable things
at night—
eyes blaze kinder than the
stark sun,
hands hold one thing
at a time.

The field loves us and
says so with the
swish at our feet,
its monotony broken for now.
The moon likes our
work, bows down,
says This is what you
look like—
lays a single shadow
at our feet.

Words left unravelled,
the silence is full, wise.
The circles are
small, slow now and
we go home.

Meredith Wayne

MR. L.

staticky cotton loosely clings to thin legs covered in downy
hair and ripe red scars—
scars spread like his goodnight kisses on knees and thighs—
thighs gangly as long fingers which curl on keys of ivory—
ivory stained with years like the scattered deck which hides
its royal faces in velvet cushions.

With whispers and giggles we dribble down the stairs, flowing
out of sleeping bags,
because my legs are delicate as arms in the sky when brown
hair spills on the sofa and his hands grip my ankles,
draping pink ruffles around my neck
until a grandfather clock beats warnings through the dusty
living room
and I think of overalls, my duffle bag, and the stuffed duck
who never stops smiling.

Wanting a ride home I pretend to be sick—
sick with watery brown eyes to plead for the company of the
tawny hair freckled girl who fears only lightning and would
rather I stay just one more night.

Kerry Espinola

Susannah Franklin

Susannah Franklin

Peanut Butter Pie

Wes Ingwersen

At precisely 5:15 p.m. Charles stepped off the subway train onto the granite slab demarcating the edge of the platform, then continued across the platform to the escalator. Getting on the escalator during the rush hour was not a walk in the park. A thick mass of working men and women always congealed at the base; thinning out at the metal, grated pod. Charles managed to slide in between two men with overcoats two feet before the steel side of the escalator stood to support the weight of urbania. He commended himself for the agile maneuver just as the revolving plastic carpet anchored his feet and began to lift him towards 24th Street. Charles fixed his gaze on his right hand which was cinched around the black rubber rail and stood motionless until the escalator merged with the street. Once on the sidewalk, Charles directed his gaze toward the bus stop. Charles had, after traveling home from the office at the same time Monday through Friday for years, acquired a singular strategy for avoiding the long waits at the bus stop. First Charles would check the covered stop at the corner of 24th. If all the slots for seated bodies were occupied on the bench, Charles would advance to the stop, drop his briefcase next to the fire hydrant, and stand waiting the arrival of the blue line. If vacancies were apparent on the bench, Charles would assume that the bus would not arrive within five minutes, enabling him to trot to the next closest stop, a block away, and board the red line. Charles never doubted the accuracy of his plan, rather it pleased him to have an edge over the melée at rush hour. Today Charles perceived the bench full and proceeded toward it with his stoic stride, caught the bus and was promptly seated in his seventh story apartment by 5:40 p.m.

Sundays were leisure days for Charles, not because of any religious duty, but because Charles chose Saturday as the day to complete the work and chores; leaving Sunday void of any obligatory activity. This is not to say that Sundays were not routine. Charles' lifestyle was accustom to repetition and in fact impregnable to spontaneity.

One of the chosen activities for Sunday was an afternoon excursion to a small city park. The park was enclosed by a wrought-iron fence. The rusty tint of the iron bars was visible to the pedestrian passing by outside the park; another characteristic not so ostensible was the fact that not one of the thousands of

iron bars was missing from the fence. The pith of the park was sheltered from the ferocity of the city by a dense thicket of hardwood trees whose branches stretched out past the park wall over streets until they were amputated by the city crews when they unlawfully intruded on traffic lights and telephone wires. The trees were intrusive to the habits of the city, but their disruptive nature didn't seem to halt their growth—establishing and incumbent cycle of incision-regeneration.

Charles' weekly visits to the park were always brief. Pausing on a park bench provided Charles a breathe of bliss quickly ousted by a timely countenance. Park life was too uneventful for Charles—still Charles insisted on stopping in the park every Sunday. Charles felt unimpeded to move through the park with vigor, there was something intangible in the smell of the grass and the sounds of solitude which even a ticking wrist watch couldn't unbalance. Some mechanism in Charles' brain would always remind him of his schedule in the end; he would walk towards the gate at a crescendo pace and carelessly leave the rewards of the park behind.

Charles followed the path around the park covering all of the displays of procured flora and then sat down on a bench. Next to Charles on the bench sat a woman, profoundly feminine in feature but not stapled to a gender by mannerism. Charles acknowledged her presence with a peripheral eye. He recognized her voice interrupt his plain stare.

"I was wondering, why do they rake up all of the fallen leaves covering the park?"

"Were you speaking to me?" Charles asked, unprepared for such a question without a tidy introduction or greeting.

"Yes," replied the woman.

"Well," Charles began, still a bit startled, "I suppose the city wants to keep the park grounds in order."

"Then they treat our park like another city street, another concrete mall frozen over churned dirt?"

Charles paused to try to understand where the woman was coming from; no answer immediately formed in his head, so he spoke to fill the awkward silence. "That is a good question, though I haven't thought much about it."

She sighed to allow her thoughts to stray and settle as a tender breeze soothed her bare ankles. The idea of the city's arbitration over this plot of land flustered her and spawned and angelic sympathy for the park and its arbitrator.

The breeze picked up and Charles figured that his time at the park was up. Charles lifted his jacket from in between himself and the woman and was determined to put it on while walking away, thus avoiding the skirmish of working his arms through the sleeves in the tight space allowed him on his side of the bench. Assuming the woman was consumed in her thoughts he did not say good-bye.

The sunlight receded across his living room carpet and Charles flicked on his television set to watch the weather report. A resounding knock penetrated the air and the sound entered Charles' right ear causing his brows to furrow and his eyes to narrow. Charles wondered why someone would be knocking at his door. Immediately he dismissed the reverberating thud as commotion from the floor above, but after a second spent processing Charles turned off the TV and approached the door. Through the peephole he observed a woman standing motionless and staring right at him. Charles drew the door open only partway.

"Who is it?"

"The lady from the park."

Charles proceeded to open the door.

"Mr. Prescott?"

"Yes, that's me, how did you know?"

"You left your checkbook lying on the bench. I realized your apartment was within walking distance so I decided to deliver it to you."

"Why, I didn't even realize it was missing. Thank you very much; it would have given me such a headache—would you like to come in?"

"No, but thank you. I want to walk home before the darkness sets in."

Charles slid his checkbook in his coat and then looked at the woman. She smiled warmly and began to walk towards the stairwell.

Charles pronounced good-bye but his voice was not audible to the woman, who had already descended the first few stairs. He closed the door but did not move about. Charles felt flushed like he did many years ago, when mother would surprise him with her peanut butter pie as he plunged in the kitchen on a Friday afternoon. The pie was a treat because Charles was the only one in his family who ate it so he would have the entire pie to himself. Mother would only bake the pie when she knew her son would least expect it but thereto most enjoy it. She did it out of a maternal love for her son expressed best through an offering only the mother can make and which can render immediate euphoria in her son. Peanut butter pie was the token, and it

established an umbilical connection between Charles and his mother. Charles slept unusually well that Sunday night.

On Monday Charles had to be at the office by 8:00. He awoke at 6:30, showered, ate, dressed, and was out the door by 7:15, as scheduled. The bus was five minutes late, but Charles always accounted for those kind of delays so he arrived in the office as punctual as ever. His wallet sat cozily in his coat pocket during the week; it was not left unattended and Charles did not miss his mother's peanut butter pie.

Matt Jones

Michael O'Neill

Property of the State of Mississippi

Heather Chappell

"Hey, Fuck Pig," the man hunched over the top bunk slurred at me. The grit from the floor was wearing the outer thigh of my pants, the chalky grey-blue filing at the fabric. My feet were tingling from being cross-legged so long, but damn bottom bunk, cement wall pressed into your face, PROPERTY OF THE STATE OF MS screaming diagonally on the metal rod, no fucking way. Here it was more open, air careening words tossed through metal slots across the hall, smell of warming Veg-All slipping from the kitchen, dirt wearing pulls in my clothes.

"I said *hey*, Fuck Pig," his voice prodded again, and he turned his neck too far—like when you jilt out a crick. His feet crunched on the crusted floor, and he crouched. "I hear you like cunt."

The voice boiled through my joints, licked the back of my eyeballs, hurt. You have to understand, I have a wife and kids at home. I love them. I'm a good father, husband. It hurts when people say I'm not. So I looked up from the fuzzy pill I was tugging, his voice still gurgling in me, and I was thinking I'd probably chew off his nose, but then he got up. He sagged back over the side of his bunk.

"You nasty, sitting on the floor. We only get showers every other day out here. And that sink's no bigger than a piss ant." He cocked his foot toward the basin jutting from the wall. "So, Fuck Pig, you talk at all?"

Well, I told him I did talk, when I had something to say. I'm a civil kind of guy, even to people who deserve jail grit in every callous, who've earned unwashed hair clinging to their cheeks. Then I went back to picking the fuzz off of my pants, thinking that I ought to keep myself presentable—can't get down about things.

"Well, Fuck Pig, I figure it's about time you stop messing wich yourself and find something to say." He cupped his hand over his cheek like he was thinking.

"You got any family?" I said, finally.

"Yeah. Live with my mom. She's gone off the deep end since I been here, though. Got a visit from Mr. Sammy last week—he owns Rob & Jay's Kountry Store and Koin Laundry right off the square? Anyway, he came over here and

says that Mom is staying with them. Says they found her in the parking lot at closing time, holding her head, saying she's been shot. Saying she got to hold her brains in. Well, Mr. Sammy don't see no blood, so he takes a look. Turns out she bought a can of Grands!—you know, them pop-open biscuits in a can—and it fell behind her head and busted open. She thought she was shot, put her hand back and felt the biscuits," he chuckled. "Thought her brains was falling out, lordy!"

"She miss you much?"

"Nah. I took up money for eating and the Talladega dog tracks. She's got Mr. Sammy and her Genesis videos she tapes off VH-1 to keep her company. Don't need me. She comes to visit sometimes, tells me what Lula's bohuncas looks like in her pastel overcoat or sniffles on about how she'd like to 'pass to glory' like so-in-so, whichever postman or deacon's mom died this week. She's finally stopped shaving her eyebrows, too, said her hands don't work no more. 'When you call upon the name of Our Father, you keep in mind the hands of the arthritic.' Her eyebrows are growing back in these funny prickly clumps." He stopped again, his breath quick with small laughter.

"I've never heard of anybody shaving their eyebrows but hoods," I said, interrupting his giggles.

"Oh, I don't mean stripes or just part of the eyebrow like them project kids. I mean the whole damn eyebrow. Then she takes this brown powder this little red brush that looks like an Exacto Knife and makes arches right back in the same place." He pursed his lips, stretched his forehead, and acted out the process. This time we both laughed, thin and quiet.

"They come get me at home. I hear VH-1 on in the den, the house still smelling like the Lilt home perm she give herself that morning. They get you at home, Fuck Pig?"

Whimpering heat, a miasma of alcohol and Mississippi morning press on my head. My hands are sticky, I want water, to go find water, to clean them up. Start walking down Taylor, I guess headed to the Jitney Jungle. "No," I said. "They picked me up on Old Taylor Road. I was just on the way to Jitney." Just because you drink doesn't mean your bad. Just because you drink doesn't mean you hurt women. "I'm glad they didn't go after me at home. This way the kids don't have to know; we decided they don't have to know. Sherry isn't going to tell them."

"There's a rapist out," Sherry hushes to me, her hands folding and

refolding the *Seward Journal*. "This is the second time." She flattens the paper and looks at me, her fingers creeping around the word *rape* and her eyes flitting between my eyeballs. She calls Ashley in, and when Ashley opens the folding door it snaps at her, static electricity because she scuffs her flip-flops on the carpet. My wife tells her about people being scary and sometimes not nice, so she needs to learn to take care of herself when she walks home from school. Like step back if a car stops and not all policemen are real and she worries so much nobody would hurt *my* daughter and then I notice the soles of her feet look pinker now that she's got a tan, her toes curled around sandals and I stand up and say, "She'll take the goddamn bus from now on," and leave the room.

"Yeah. Bet it's hard for you to leave those kids." He propped his bare foot on his knee, the hair on the top of his foot curling around his knuckles. It was blacker than the faded, drooping curtain over his ears. He ran his fingernail through the corner of his toenail, looked at what he'd removed and flicked it toward the sink. "I got an ingrown toenail last time I was in. I don't know how many times you been brought in while you were in the county, but you'd think they could at least keep a guy's toenails cut. They kept saying, wait another couple of weeks, saying, your toenails are too thick for these cutters, saying we got to get some scissors. And what do you know? I was hobbling around with a purple foot for a month."

"What'd you do, cut it in the middle?"

"Yeah. Bo said cut it in the middle, make a little 'v' and it'd heal up just fine. It didn't, though, and where I cut it was bloody, and my toe was all yellow and purple and brown. It was a mess. Finally they just took that toenail clean off."

"My daughter lost a toenail once. Fell off riding her bike."

She's heaped on the asphalt, knees tucked under the Huffy handle, foot hooked by the wheel. I jog over but I am slow, and she's pulling herself out of the tangle. The Peters' garbage has spilled from the collision; a Steak-Umm's box and crushed can of Pabst Blue Ribbon are in the street. Her toe is pale, jaundicing lavender. Her fingertips quiver on the insides of her elbows. My mind nudges her plastic seat again, slipping her down the hill, the florescent-lined pedal whirring as her foot slipped. I touch her knee, two driblets of blood from a patch of raw pink and sand, and she isn't crying. *I'm okay Daddy, really*, because she doesn't want me to think I hurt her. But I did hurt her, blood blister swimming red under the nail, and I can't get up, just look at her foot, feeling its

throbbing behind my eyes. *Just an accident, Daddy, I'm fine, really,* and we sit half in the grass, half on hot driveway, the smell of rotten potted meat in our nostrils and no tears in our eyes.

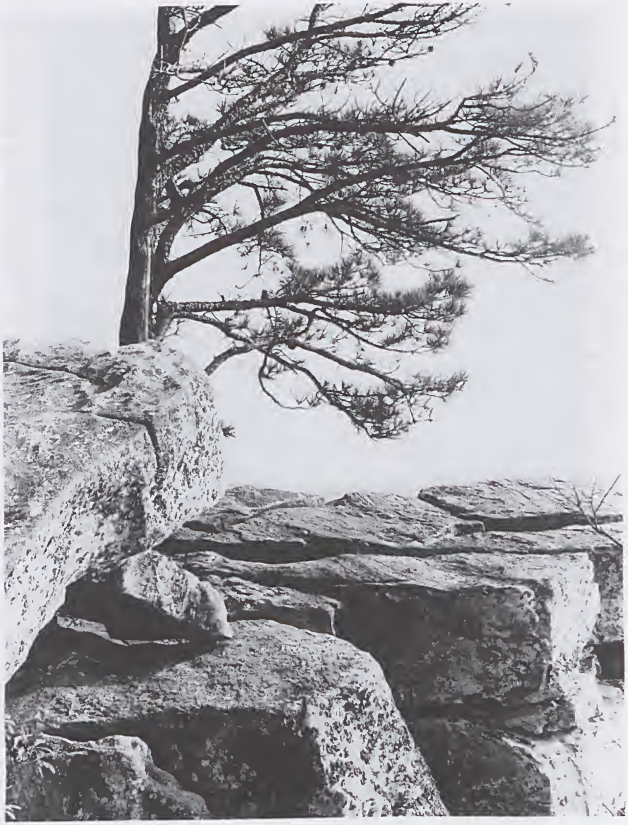
"Poor thing. Bet that hurt like a bitch."

"Uh huh."

"I'd take having all my nails picked out over damn migraines, though. This is my second one this week. Look, I'm going to rest for a little bit. Wake me up for lunch, Fuck Pig?"

"Sure." The bed was more appealing now, and in the thick, guttural hum of his breathing I crawled into the sheets. The floor grit shifted against the polyester, everything pawing at my skin with stiff, chalky fingers. I closed my eyes to the PROPERTY OF THE STATE OF MS lettering and melted into a vision of a fair-skinned breast, nipple with a tinge of violet, erect from cold and nerves. Streak of violet on the hollow of her knee, scarred splinter from fellatio on an unvarnished floor. Strips of violet on her inner thigh, filled out too quickly after puberty. Vein of violet, she presses her chin to her shoulder. Press my nose to her neck. Blue cotton, moist hair, thick labia, clutching in rhythm to the guttural hum of his breath, I feel good again.

Michael O'Neill



Susannah Franklin

for a river

i wouldn't know, if to make an ode for you,
what to say
i so much would rather listen
to a pearl rolling on linoleum sound
you give me.

underneath the trout swim
waiting for my return by boat
this long series of rows i have made
to get here, safe from the crashing
of rocks on waves.

when the night lays down sweet handkerchiefs
across your sillowy thighs
—star sprinkled bosom—
i see the moon not trapped, but supported
on lengths of moss combing hair.

Douglas Crets

purple toenail

Chewin on candy left behind

lost a feather on the
stoop.

Screendoor pressin into bare back when I lean
,let to lean,
'low mself

patterns on mback feel bumpy in your bed.

Lips wrap round bottle uh Coke
sip
gulp
take long fizzy drag.

Lifes a thing without "the"s n "a"s—

I shunnum to feel free
they flake offuh mskin
n outta mhair
collect at mfeet.

Kids come up
gigglin
stealum way
tuh build forts n water flowers—

It's a treat for'um

to do so and such
to see

purple toenail

stickin outta m'
shoe.

Mike Janssen

fish in beer

your jokes make me sick
so i ignore you
until you pull me to my feet.
acknowledgement comes
with 20 percent of my fingers
as i tell you
that fish can survive in beer
if you acclimate them slowly.

you try it later
on your goldfish aquarium
which kills one of them
& you blame me.
grudgingly i accept my guilt,
buying you a piranha as peace offering,
which kills the rest.
as you approach me hysterically
i ask if you're emotionally unstable.
when you begin kicking me
i take it to mean yes.

Daveed Gartenstein-Ross

pick three

Daveed Gartenstein-Ross

Logan V. Sinclair stood outside sucking down a menthol. He didn't even watch the TV screen that showed all the horses lined up at the starting gate prior to race four. He and Mike were down sixty dollars on the day already, had been hoping to pull in at least eighty, but now just under a hundred remained, hidden under the parking brake in their cramped Nissan Pulsar. The air was filled with the static anxiety of a massive amount of money on the line, expectant voices discussed the prospects for the next race. "I got Funeral Parlor," Vinny yelled, a blubbery track regular who'd attacked Russell Campbell, Pleasanton's favorite jockey, who'd hit a bad losing streak in the past two weeks.

Logan ground out the menthol on the bottom of his shoe and watched people scampering around him, examined the racing form. It was no good; a couple of sure-shots had lost early, their pick-threes down the tube. A couple of scratched exactas and one ludicrous attempt at a trifecta. No bets were coming in, except for a pitiful show bet they'd placed, which paid thirty cents on a six buck wager, a goddamn show bet for the odds-on favorite. The ugly woman with the long nose behind the counter had mocked him when we went to cash it, asking facetiously, "Throwing dice today, boys?"

It had all started out as a joke anyway. They'd been sitting in Taco Bell one morning, reading the store's complimentary paper. Logan had grabbed the sports section, so Mike was left looking stupidly through world events, making a few vacuous comments about the Unabomber's latest threats. The Rockies were still a half-game up on the Dodgers, and Logan was pawing through yesterday's box scores when horse-racing caught his eye. He pointed it out to Mike. "There's a track in Berkeley, remember?"

"Sure," Mike said.

"You wanna go?"

"Why?"

"Make some money." Logan took a bite from his Volcano Burrito, and some nacho cheese sauce dribbled down his chin.

Mike snorted. "We don't know a damn thing about horse racing."

Logan examined the scores carefully. "Well, the favorite almost always at least makes a show. We could just place shows on the favorite, conservatively,

and we might pack up a little change." So they'd shown up at the track with those optimistic if misguided plans, and after getting wiped out they sat in the bar, reading the rag aloud, and found out there was a name for people like them: bridge-jumpers. But soon enough they'd learned how to bet, took a few risks, hit a pick-three at the end of the day worth $110, and though this could be a substitute for a real job. Especially since they couldn't find real jobs.

Logan trudged back inside. Mike sat at the table next to an old black man wearing a battered driver's cap. Mike was reading the Bible, and the racing form sat next to it. "I like the 7 horse this race," Mike said. "I think we should take a pick-three on the 7 horse, the 2 horse, and the 9 horse." The lines were thinning out by the betting counter. Logan's own bets had already cost them quite a bit, so he'd give Mike's picks a try. He waited behind a man in greasy overalls with long unwashed hair. The 7 horse—Funeral Parlor—same pick that Vinny liked. Hell with it. Logan placed his bets with the long-nosed woman who didn't like him anyway. He turned around, almost bumped into a short, weasely fellow, everyone called him Iron Joe, who haunted the track almost every day. His big claim to fame was that he once met Barry Hay from Golden Earring when the group was still big. Once in a while he'd pop off some wisdom with, "Well, *Barry* told me..."

The horses were lined up at the starting gate. Logan could almost make them out on the monitor twenty feet away. People milled around outside smoking, drinking beer, muttering, "Come on 3, come on 3, come on 3." Logan lit up another menthol and turned toward the rotating glass doors that led back inside. Multiple rows of tables lined the floor, tables at odd angles seating gamblers, old men with cigars in their jacket pockets. Women far past their prime who looked for the big winners, professional handicappers who came to the track with $150 and kept on betting until it was all gone, sticking their winnings in their other pocket. Mexicans who spoke no English, their quick fluid stream of words ending with the horse's number in Spanish, *numero dos, numero dos!* The starting gun fired. Logan couldn't hear it but felt the tension rise as the horses broke out of the gate and there was a hush as the expectant bettors waited to see who made a quick start, waited for the little numbers to appear at the bottom of the screen because they really couldn't tell which horse was which without the numbers.

Horse three! Come on three! Go three!

Logan couldn't watch, couldn't bear seeing his horse lead for half a lap again only to fall behind and finish out of the money. Horse seven. Vinny was screaming: *Come on seven! Come on seven! Come on Russell!* Then his tone changed: *No, Russell! Eat this, Russell! I'm never betting on you again!* Logan turned and saw the large man giving the finger to the monitor, screaming at Russell, who'd obviously fallen behind. Logan remembered the first time he'd been to the track, when Vinny had told them about Russell Campbell. "The best jockey in Pleasanton, far and away. You wanna bet on that guy," Vinny had said with such conviction that Logan and Mike put a $10 win bet on Russell. But Russell lost the first race by a nose, and Vinny still assured them that Russell was the man to beat. "Watch him come back and win his next three races," Vinny had said. So they'd continued to put money down on Campbell, but he didn't even finish in the money in the second and third races. Vinny was on the edge of tears after the third race and didn't bet on Russell for the last race of the day, but Logan and Mike had a feeling. They bet on Russell again, a sizable win bet, while Vinny put his money on another horse. Sure enough, Russell won, leaving Vinny cursing him and flipping off the video monitor.

But now, Vinny was again rooting for Russell. The rebirth, a miracle. *Come on Russell! Oh Russell, yes yes yes yes—*

The race was over. Unofficial results were in. Logan looked up at the screen. 7-1-5. They'd won. He high-fived Mike. "You're the master, man!" Logan said. Mike only looked up momentarily from the Bible. A $6 win bet on a 3-1, so Logan cashed the winning ticket in for $24. They were still down on the day, but Logan decided he could afford a beer. He shouldered aside an old lady shriveled up like a California prune, past a couple of thick-necked ex-football players in Raiders jacket who were discussing the team's move to Oakland, past Vinny, to the bar. He grabbed a stool, asked for a simple bottle of Budweiser. Beer's good for the nerves. Lots of people have nerves at the track, that's why they can charge three bucks a bottle and still rake in a profit.

A tall, thin woman in a red velvet dress slid up next to him. She had faint scars on her arms, blemishes in her well-cultivated tan, which could be interpreted in any number of ways. Her dress hung loosely away from her flesh. "How ya doin, boy?" she asked, leaning toward him.

"Losing the day," he said. She moved on. Looking for a winner. He polished off the beer and trudged over to Mike, who'd set aside the Bible to study the racing form. Looking up, Mike said, "Put a win bet on the 2. I'm real

sure about this one. You might wanna put in ten bucks or so, it's a sure-shot. Keep the pick-three rolling with a 2-9-5."

"What's the five horse?" Logan asked.

"Tomato Soup. It's odds are low, so it'll make a good pick-three when it wins. I just have a feeling about this one."

"Why?"

"It's a strong finisher. Last race it was in fifth coming into the last furlough, and charged all the way up to third. This race is a furlough longer, and the favorite, Computer Crimes, is a bad finisher. She finished in fifth after leading for the first three furloughs, last time it ran this length of race."

"Sounds good to me." Logan placed the bets, walked back outside. This time he had no problem watching the monitor. There weren't many people outside, and only one other guy cheered. This guy liked the five horse. The two horse grabbed the lead early, the five horse at its heels. The five charged at the end, and the guy urged it on with his screams, but Logan shouted him down: *Go two, go two, go two!* Another win. They were one race away from hitting the pick three. That would put them in the win column. Mike would just sit there reading the Bible, looking at the racing form, hopefully calling the winners. Logan, on the other hand, had nothing to do but pace and smoke and silently pray that the nine horse would win the next one.

The milling outside ground to a halt. The horses lined up at the starting gate for the last race left on Logan's pick-three. The gunshot. The race was on.

If the Moon is a She

I know the path of the moon
on her back,
that she glides through
the blue sherbet night
like a spoon.

(if indeed the moon is a she)

I know the touch of her hand
is soft,
she stretches her pearls
in the distant
smooth sand.

(you see how far she reaches)

I know how she moves in the lines
of a poem,
that she waltzes on lakes
and strikes
upon stone.

I know how she looks
on my mother's face.

(she shines across oceans.)

Brittany Browning

Here Now

Kristina Hemphill

Susannah Franklin

As the crow flies

On broken-arm branches
her friends preen and snack
on the breeze. She hollers
for a nest made of twigs
wheedled from crows. I compete
with the forms etched into a cloud,
jaywalk across a birdsong staff,
fish a tin cochlea from a dead tree's
cauliflower ear. Under uneven cirrus
I stuff spoonfuls of mud in my pocket.
When the grackles screech foreign
names, I line her bed with the scum
caked on my hands, weave green saplings
together. A grin winding through her skin,
she settles into horsehair, trash, twine
and plunges her hands into cats' eyes, sequins,
coughing up fluent babble
in a language written on the air.

Mike Janssen

blind repo w m n

i seize things
i notice
i taken note
still figurin life
figurin me
i smile
my children
eyes closed
acutely aware
hands probing
attentively awaiting
always
an answer
mind echoes remembrance
as i
i borrow words
completing thoughts
as i
i steal prints
for mined pictures
recollecting life
for them of i
i
i who repossess

Katina Parker

Mother

Jane Oslislo

My Brother's Keeper Katina Parker

The Fish

Gaye-Taylor Hederman

One is wheeled past me as I sit on the edge of my seat, elbows to knees. Two more are parked in front of the fish tank intently watching the blue rocks give off their iridescent glow. Four are stationed in a perfect square around the table next to me, each equidistant from the centerpiece of a pepper shaker and a pot of fake ivy. Mouths open; clicking, gurgling noises emerge from several throats. Fingers clasp and unclasp the arms of wheelchairs or of attending nurses.

The only familiar face belongs to the person in front of me, whose grinding teeth cause my shoulders to shiver the way they do when my knife scrapes the bottom of a plate. She has my nose, and on her I can trace the shape of my mouth and oval face. When she could speak, she would apologize for giving me such straight limp hair. Her apology served both to give us common ground and to give me a complex about boring hair, resulting in two disastrous adolescent perms.

A nurse in teal blue scrubs nods at me, balancing two trays of the hot lunch soon to be served. She keeps a steady smile for everyone in the dining area. I suppose if I were here day-in, day-out, my smile would become as brave as hers. Or maybe I would quit smiling altogether.

My voice vacillates from short blasts of a story to terrifying seconds of silence. "I remember when we used to make cherry-dumpling cake; do you remember that? I stood on a stool at your counter, and you rolled the dough? And you had those huge cans of Queen Anne cherries?" My hands have made the international signs for a 9x13 pan and a 32-ounce can of cherries. My voice screeches out of my windpipe. I'm grinning like an idiot. "And then at Christmas when everybody came? And we made it, and everybody got some? And then you warned everybody about the pits in the cherries because the store only had the kind with pits?" Pause pause pause. Grinding teeth. I have said every sentence as if it were a question, and I'm not sure why.

"And then half-way through dessert you decided to tell everybody about the pits one more time? And Reed, Jr. looked up and said, 'What pits?'?" I laugh and she laughs, forced air and noise bubbling to the top of her throat. A part of her laugh is the same as ever, only now she won't separate her teeth

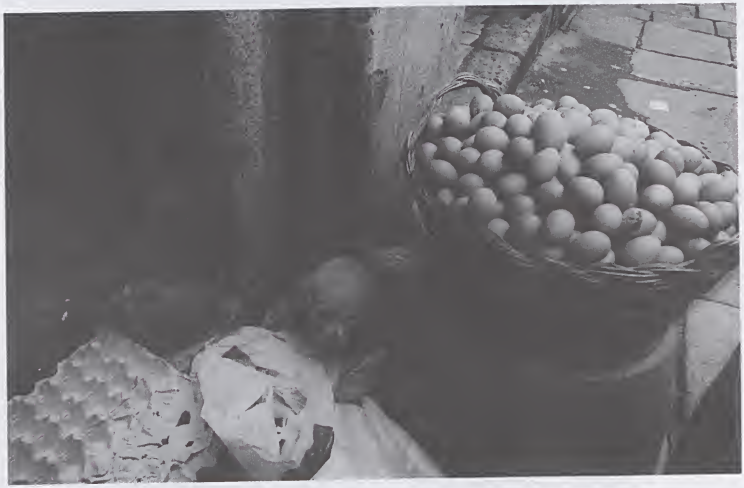
except to eat. Grind, grind, laugh, laugh. "I mean, he must've eaten about five nickel-sized pits!" I am holding her hand now, and my throat gets hot because I cannot steady her Parkinson's, no matter how I flatten her hand between mine. The disease is working from the inside out, and I am working from the outside in, steadying a hand, putting food in her mouth, and trying to sink claws into some part of her brain that is untouched by the Alzheimer's. I'm losing. I would give anything to be inside. I wouldn't allow life to game-play with an 85-year-old. She's had 31,025 days of experience, including two World Wars, four children, eleven grand-children, a retail business, a husband's death, and a vegetable garden. Who do we think we are to sit shoveling mashed potatoes into her mouth?

A smiling nurse comes to help feed her. The nurse's smooth, dark hand silhouettes her translucent onion skin, the blue veins are mountains in the ridges of knuckles. The nurse does not try to steady the Parkinson's.

I shift my eyes to the fish tank. The two admirers of the glowing rocks still sit with limp wrists and gaping mouths. The flitting fish so not catch their attention. A black guppy swivels his weight side-to-side propelling himself along the perimeter of the glass. In an instant, he disappears into the tangled mass of plastic plants. The water blurs, and my eyes have to readjust. A rush of hazy greens, and I'm focused. As I brush against rough plastic seaweed veils of algae peel off the stalks and float away. I watch my arms tuck in and melt into silvery fins, and I follow a goldfish to a mass of guzzling bubbles. I flip my tail, and an eerie-blue glow from the floor temporarily stuns me. On the bottom rests a box, and I thrust my body down to it. Moving an unblinking eye to the open lid I am disappointed in its plastic yellow-painted doubloons and fake pearls. The guppy continues his orbit around the edge of the tank.

I can feel water dripping over my face, and the reflection of the rock-gazers stares back at me undisturbed.

Susannah Franklin



Reprieve

Margaret Feinberg

Wolves

Out of starlit silence
came the call
to prayer
from the high tower
of the blue mosaic mosque.
The moaning
low and solemn
and over that
the high desire.
One full sound from earth to heaven

Brittany Browning

Beatitudes

Another bomb today. Again the burial society, following
tradition, scrapes flesh off shop windows, off half-eaten cakes
at sidewalk cafes. The black skeleton lies supine, entrails exposed
and smell of burning tires. Blessed are they who wait

to read the list of victims. The impotent man leaves his bed
and goes to work. Others watch the television, staying
with it like a lover. A woman turns her head
to the apathetic sun. Blessed are the far away

they can do nothing. Grief drops like perspiration
from the brow of the world. Black smoke rises
in prayer, and the mother sets an extra plate
for her son who caught the bus. Blessed are the sacrifices

may they mean something. Blessed are the peacemakers
for they shall inherit what is left.

Brittany Browning

Richard Upchurch

Richard Upchurch

Richard Upchurch

Richard Upchurch

COVER
COURTESY
OF
GAYE-TAYLOR
HEDERMAN

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